NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE
CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD

EARLY SUCCESSIONAL HABITAT DEVELOPMENT/MANAGEMENT

(Ac.)

Code 647

DEFINITION

Manage early plant succession to benefit desired wildlife or natural communities.

PURPOSE

- Increase plant community diversity.
- Provide wildlife or aquatic habitat for early successional species.
- Provide habitat for declining species.

CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES

On all lands that are suitable for the kinds of wildlife and plant species that are desired.

CRITERIA

Early successional management will be designed to achieve the desired plant community in density, vertical and horizontal structure, and plant species diversity.

Methods used will be designed to maintain soil erosion quality criteria. All habitat manipulations will be planned and managed according to soil capabilities and recommendations for management will avoid excessive soil loss. Soil disturbance shall follow topographical contours where soil erosion concerns exist.

Techniques to maintain, enhance, or create early successional habitat include, but are not limited to: light disking, mowing, roller chopping, chipping, web-plow, herbicides, prescribed grazing and prescribed burning. Where applicable, refer to NRCS conservation practice standards *Upland and Wetland Wildlife Habitat Management*, Codes 645 and 644, *Brush Management*, Code 314, *Pest Management*, Code 595, *Prescribed Grazing*, Code 528, and *Prescribed Burning*, Code 338.

Where applicable, management by prescribed burning or, to a lesser degree, ground disturbance shall be encouraged over mowing.

This and other essential practices shall be applied periodically to maintain the desired early successional plant community.

Establishment of native plant species shall be encouraged over introduced species. Introduced sod-forming grasses (e.g., bahiagrass, bermudagrass, etc.) are not permitted.

Category I & II invasive species as listed by the Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council shall not be used. Management measures shall be provided to control invasive species and noxious weeds and comply with state laws.

Herbicides shall be used according to label instructions and rates and only for habitat reclamation or control of noxious or invasive plants.

Management practices and activities are not to disturb cover during the primary nesting period for early successional species. Exceptions will be allowed for periodic burning or mowing when necessary to maintain the health of the plant community and to allow plant establishment.

At least 20% of ground nesting habitat shall protected from habitat management activities when conducted 30 days prior to or during the prime ground nesting period (i.e., March 1st to July 15th).

To benefit insect food sources for grassland nesting birds, spraying or other control of noxious weeds will be done on a “spot” basis to protect forbs and legumes that benefit native pollinators and other wildlife.

Impacts to cultural resources and Federal and State protected species shall be evaluated during planning, design and implementation of this conservation practice in accord with established National and Florida NRCS policy (General Manual, Title 450-Part 401 and Title 190-Part 410.22; National Planning Procedures Handbook, FL Supplements to Parts 600.1 and 600.5).

CONSIDERATIONS

If the managed area is of sufficient size and when practical, habitat treatments should be rotated among and within fields.

Consider the specific needs of each species or suite of species being managed for. Management for one species may or may not be beneficial to other grassland dependent species.

In conjunction with the purposes of this standard, strips of early successional habitat can be created on existing cropland, grazing land, and riparian areas using NRCS conservation practice standards *Upland Wildlife Habitat Management*, Code 645, *Filter Strip*, Code 393, *Contour Buffer Strips*, Code 332, Conservation Cover, Code 327, *Field Borde*r, Code 386, and *Riparian Herbaceous Cover*, Code 390.

Management should encourage plant species diversity that provides cover for nesting, escape and brood rearing as well as an abundance of food.

For early successional species tolerant to or preferring a shrub or tree component, consider using *Forest Stand Improvement*, Code 666, to develop early successional habitat within forested habitat and *Hedgerow Planting*, Code 422, and spot plantings using *Tree/Shrub Establishment*, Code 612, to promote habitat diversity in open areas.

Managing for early successional plant communities is beneficial if not essential for less mobile animal species. For less mobile species, it is more important to provide all the habitat requirements in a small area.

Treatment design should facilitate the use of equipment, make use of natural features, and facilitate the safe use of prescribed fire to achieve the intended purpose.

Prescribed burning of native early successional ecosystems should mimic natural fire frequencies and seasons of occurrence.

If grazing is used as a management tool to achieve the intended purpose of this practice, a grazing plan is required.

This practice may be used to promote the conservation of declining species, including threatened and endangered (plant, wildlife or aquatic) species.

PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS

Specifications for this practice shall be prepared for each site. Specifications shall be recorded using approved specifications sheets, job sheets, narrative statements in the conservation plan, or other acceptable documentation.

OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

The following actions shall be carried out to insure that this practice functions as intended throughout its expected life. These actions include normal repetitive activities in the application and use of the practice (operation), and repair and upkeep of the practice (maintenance).

Any use of fertilizers, pesticides and other chemicals to assure early successional management shall not compromise the intended purpose.

REFERENCES

Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council, Category I and II lists, http://www.fleppc.org/

Myers, R. and J. Ewel. 1990. Ecosystems of Florida. University of Central Florida Press, Orlando, FL. 765pp.

NRCS. Field Office Technical Guide,
Section II: Threatened and Endangered Species
Section IV: Conservation Practice Standards,
Brush management, Code 314
Conservation Cover, Code 327
ContourBuffer Strips, Code 332
Field Border, Code 386
Filter Strip, Code 393
Forest Stand Improvement, Code FL666

Hedgerow planting, Code 422
Pasture and Hay Planting, Code 512
Prescribed Burning, Code 338
Prescribed Grazing, Code 528
Riparian Herbaceous Cover, Code 390
Tree/Shrub Establishment, Code 612
Upland Wildlife Habitat Management, Code 655
Wetland Wildlife Habitat Management, Code 644

NRCS. 1979. Management for Wildlife: a Supplement to Wildlife Standards and Specifications for Florida. Gainesville, FL. 89pp.

NRCS. General Manual,
Title 190-Compliance with NEPA, Part 410.22 - Threatened, and Endangered Species of Plants and Animals.
Title 190-Compliance with NEPA, Part 410.26 – Protection of Wetlands.
Title 420- Social Sciences, Part 401 - Cultural Resources (Archeological and Historic Properties).

NRCS. National Planning Procedures Handbook, Part 600.5 – Exhibits: FL2 to FL6

NRCS. Wildlife Habitat Management Institute, Fish and Wildlife Habitat management Leaflets, Leaflet No. 8: 1999. Grassland Birds. 12pp.
Leaflet No. 9: 1999. Northern Bobwhite. 12pp.

Pfaff, Sharon et al. 2002. Florida Native Seed Production Manual. USDA-NRCS, Plant Materials Center, Brooksville, FL. 76pp.